



**First Edition - Summer 2013**

## **A Message From Director David Berns...**

I am pleased to introduce "The Vine," an electronic publication featuring the latest news and information from the Department of Human Services (DHS). In light of the changes in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, and other services to the most vulnerable citizens of the District of Columbia, we felt that the current sense of urgency requires increased communication with all of our customers and our stakeholders.

Part of our job is to help the broader community to understand and accept responsibility for urgent action. Each day a child remains in poverty, it increases the risks of them failing in school, developing mental or other health issues, becoming a teen parent, and continuing the cycle of poverty into adult life. For the business community, poverty hampers the

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chance of developing a competent workforce necessary for a strong economy. The work that each of us undertakes contributes to promoting urgency and instilling hope.

Here you will find feature stories about our customers, information about our services, and news that we think is pertinent to the health and human services community.

We invite individuals and organizations to share your experiences and success stories with us, so that we may include them here as encouragement for others. Enjoy.

## Urgency and Hope for TANF Recipients



This fall, October first— to be precise—more than 7,000 families in the District who have received Temporary

Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for longer than five years, and are not disabled, or exempt for some other reason, will experience a 25 percent reduction in their cash benefits. This cut will add to the 20 percent reduction these families experienced two years ago.

Furthermore, by the same time two years from now, there will be approximately 10,000 families who will have been receiving TANF for longer than 60 months, and will no longer be eligible for cash benefits at all. Many of these families are starting to feel a sense of urgency.



Director David Berns at the One City Summer Kick-Off and Truck Touch.



DHS' Strong Families team at "Beat the Streets" earlier this summer.



Mayor Vincent C. Gray addresses summer workers at the Summer Youth Employment Truancy Summit.



Some are energetically engaged in plans to find employment or increase their job readiness skills, while some still struggle to find a sense of purpose.

"I know people who think the whole new policy is unfair because they don't want to work or go to school or do anything, but I'm in school because I don't want to be on TANF forever, but I know it takes time and work to move forward," said Shanequa Sanders. Sanders is a TANF recipient who is in the process of completing her high school diploma at Roosevelt STAY Senior High School. [Read more.](#)

## DHS Implements New Service Delivery Model



At a glance, Erica Earle looks like a charming, happy-go-lucky teenager, without a care in the world, complete with a ponytail and braces. Her smile is warm and inviting, and almost forces those

who come in contact with it to return the gesture. One would never know that just two years ago, she was homeless. [Read more.](#)

Mayor Vincent C. Gray and other city leaders celebrate the opening of the National Guard's Youth Challenge Academy.



Children enjoying the festivities at the "Day of Hope and Love" at DC General Family Shelter.



**DHS and The Community Partnership invite you to Build-a-Back Pack, Build a Future...**

Please donate a back pack and school supplies for homeless children at DC General.

Contributions are needed by Monday, August 19, 2013, and may be dropped off at any Department of Human Services (DHS) service center location.

For more information, contact Candace Nelson  
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# A TANF Re-Design Success Story



In 2004, when Brittani Wilkins was preparing to graduate from high school, little did she know, pretty soon, she'd be preparing for motherhood. By 2006, she was applying for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for herself and her two-year-old daughter, not long after a break up with her child's father. This had not been her vision for her future. [Read more.](#)

## Human Services Budget Approved



Earlier this summer, the City Council of the District of Columbia passed Mayor Vincent C. Gray's budget proposals for

Human Services, greatly enhancing supports and services for low income and homeless individuals and families in the District of Columbia.

### Vine Staff

*David Berns, Director*

*Nikol Nabors-Jackson, Chief Operating Officer*

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“On behalf of the Department of Human Services (DHS), I would like to thank Mayor Vincent C. Gray, and the City Council of the District of Columbia, for their leadership in passing legislation that will allow our agency to better serve the most vulnerable citizens of the District of Columbia,” said DHS Director David Berns. [Read more.](#)

## DHS Introduces DCAS

DC will introduce a new computer system this fall called The District of Columbia Access System (DCAS), an ultramodern health and human services solution. DCAS will offer the District’s Health Benefit Exchange a new, integrated, electronic eligibility system. It will be used to determine eligibility for Medicaid, private health insurance and other programs, in addition to performing case management capabilities that span programs and agencies. Along with determining eligibility, DCAS will be used to enroll individuals, families, and small businesses that purchase healthcare coverage through the Exchange’s online marketplace. [Read more.](#)

## EFFORTS Offers Hope to DV Victims

Rachel Morrison doesn’t look like a super hero—or at least not the kind from the comic books and





movies. She doesn't wear a cape, a mask, or a fitted suit. She doesn't have a super mobile, and she can't fly, but many say she is just that—a Superwoman.

Until 1999, Morrison was a correctional officer and drug and alcohol addiction counselor at the Lorton Correctional Facility at Occoquan. After seeing the plight of many returning citizens who were unable to get jobs or find stable housing, she says “God spoke to me and said you need to do something to help these people.” [Read more](#).

## DC Community Leaders Unite Against Homelessness



Established under the Homeless Service Reform Act of 2005, the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH)

was formed to facilitate interagency, cabinet-level leadership in planning policymaking, program development, provider monitoring, and budgeting for the Continuum of Care of homeless services. ICH consists of cabinet-level leaders, homeless services providers, advocates, homeless and formerly homeless leaders that come together to help inform and guide the District's strategies and policies for meeting the needs of individuals and families who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless in the District of Columbia.

The Committee is broken into several sub-committees that are open to community

participation: Executive; Operations and Logistics; Shelter Capacity; Youth; and Permanent Supportive Housing. [Read more.](#)

# Hurricane Season 2013: What You Should Know



by Matthew Johnson,  
Chief, Office of  
Emergency  
Management, DHS

Although not common, the District of Columbia is becoming increasingly susceptible to hurricanes and violent storms. Below are some helpful tips to prepare for and survive a hurricane.

## What is a Hurricane???

A **hurricane** is a type of tropical cyclone or severe tropical storm. Our Hurricane season begins June 1st and ends November 30th.

**Hurricanes can cause catastrophic damage** to coastlines and also up to several hundred miles inland. Hurricanes can produce winds exceeding 155 miles per hour as well as **tornadoes**. In addition, hurricanes can cause extensive damage from heavy rainfall. Flash flooding can occur due to intense rainfall. Tornadoes can cause fatalities and devastate a neighborhood in seconds. A **tornado** appears as a rotating funnel-shaped cloud that extends from a thunderstorm to the ground with whirling winds that can reach 300 miles per hour. Damage paths can be in excess of one mile wide and 50 miles long. [Read more.](#)

# Tidbits...

## One-City Summer Kick Off



As part of One City Summer, multiple agencies and community-based organizations supported through the DC Children and

Youth Investment Trust Corporation (CYITC) will offer safe, educational, recreational and nutritional activities, programs and services to District residents during the summer months. Participating agencies, including DHS, had information tables at the kickoff event, and provided details about their summer offerings. The day included interactive activities for children and youth, free food, entertainment, giveaways, the skate mobile and fun wagon, basketball tournaments, moon bounces, and more. [Read more.](#)

## MPD's Beat the Streets

The "Beat the Streets" Movement, sponsored in part by the Metropolitan Police Department was started to dispel violence, improve community relations and encourage citizens to live peacefully.



Music, food and games will be available at each event. The local government, the community, health and non-Profit agencies will also provide relevant services (Jobs, health screenings, aging information, mentoring services, etc.) to District residents. In a statement, the MPD said "bringing together these supporters allows access to information; applications and appointments which will



help DC Citizens succeed." [Read more.](#)

## **SYEP Truancy Summit**



The Department of Employment Services hosted the first annual Summer Youth Employment Program 2013 Truancy Summit

at its headquarters on Minnesota Avenue earlier this summer. The seminar was intended to reduce the number of absences recorded among summer youth employees.

The young people were also informed that those with truancy problems will not be placed in the program next year. [Read more.](#)

## **DC National Guard Opens Challenge Academy for Young People**

The National Youth Challenge Program was created in 1993 to leverage National Guard resources in local communities.



It is a preventative, rather than remedial, program that targets at-risk youth ages 16 -18 who have not completed a traditional high school program. The program is provided free of charge to participants and is funded through a collaboration of local and federal resources.

[Read more.](#)

## **Residents of DC General Enjoy a "Day of Hope and Love"**



Union Temple Baptist Church and Heart of God ministries joined forces with the YMCA this summer to sponsor a “Day of

Hope and Love” for residents of the DC General Family Shelter. The event featured free haircuts, chair massages, clothing and shoe tables, family portraits, food, face painting, Zumba dancing, a giant slide, and a WPGC radio personality.

John Deadwiler, Committee Chair for the event, said that the organizations felt the need to reach out to the residents of DC General, “It has turned out to be something more than we could have imagined with having Chick-fil-A and Henry Soul Café here, as well as the clothes and the shoes and the YMCA here too. Our whole purpose is just to love on these residents and let them know that all is not lost and there are people who care about them,” said Deadwiler.

Mayor Vincent C. Gray attended the event shaking hands and speaking with residents. He encouraged participants to enjoy the merriment, “I’m not here to give any official remarks, and you didn’t come out to hear any long speeches from me anyway. I just want you to have a good time, and enjoy the food, music and festivities,” said Gray.

**Submissions for the Vine may  
be forwarded to [DHS newsletter team](#)**



## Urgency and Hope for TANF Recipients

In 1996, Congress placed a five-year time limit on Federal cash benefits. Most states responded by imposing a five-year time limit on local funding as well. District of Columbia policymakers felt that the time limits were unrealistic for many families receiving TANF benefits in their wards. Time limits were not imposed, work requirements were minimal, and local money was used to replace federal funding no longer available for those receiving assistance for longer than 60 months.

“Although our original decisions were intended as a humane way to protect children and families, the unintended consequence was that many families remained on TANF for many years,” said Department of Human Services (DHS) Director David Berns. The cash benefit has always been just enough money to keep people alive, but not enough to support or encourage families to succeed,” added Director Berns.

Until recently, without the urgency of time limits, the District provided only limited services to help families obtain employment. Only a small fraction of families receiving TANF were referred to mandatory services, and those who chose not to participate faced minimal penalties, financial or otherwise. About two years ago, District policymakers reconsidered this approach.

Under the new design, the District is phasing in the five-year time limit. Now that families are facing the time limit—work readiness assessments and Individual Responsibility Plans (IRP) are conditions of eligibility. “What we’re trying to do is create a sense of pride for our TANF recipients in taking that step, getting their assessment, getting excited about their plan, and also creating a sense of empowerment,” said Economic Security Administration (ESA) Administrator Deborah Carroll.

After a TANF customer completes an IRP with a DHS Vocational Development Specialist (VDS), the customer is assigned to a TANF Employment Provider (TEP) based on the results of his or her Online Work Readiness Assessment (OWRA). Customers with low or minimal barriers to employment are assigned automatically to a job placement TEP; while those who are not as work ready are sent to a work readiness TEP. Some customers with significant barriers such as domestic violence or substance abuse are referred for barrier remediation services with the appropriate service provider.

“The District has such rich resources. I have never seen a customer come to us for help that had to be turned away and put on a waiting list. Customers can attend the UDC Community College and a number of other job training programs through the Department of Employment Services at no cost to the client. We augment their financial aid with the TAPPIT scholarship for TANF recipients. The money can be used to pay those last remaining costs like books, enrollment fees, and other such school-related expenses,” said Carroll.



## DHS Implements New Service Delivery Model

In 2009, Earle graduated from Spingarn Senior High in Washington, DC, a year ahead of her class at the age of 17. She left DC to attend a small, two-year university in the Allegheny Mountains; and, after completing her first year, returned home pregnant. Earle says that not long after, her family lost their home, and she found herself in the DC General Shelter applying for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

"The shelter was scary, but it wasn't all bad," said Earle. "In fact, it was a good experience. It gave me something to strive for, and makes me appreciate what I have now. A lot of people always complain about what they don't have, and I live from pay check to pay check, but I'm happy," she added.

While in the shelter, Earle was given a work readiness assessment and assigned to a TANF employment provider. She says that she immersed herself in the resume writing classes and job searches. Just one month later, Earle was hired as a security guard. She has since moved into her own apartment with her two-year-old son, and is studying to take a test to join the National Guard.

"I'm not disappointed nor am I sad, I'm kind of grateful for the experience. Although, I won't do it again—I'm not going back to the shelter—but if it weren't for the people at the shelter, I wouldn't have made it this far," said Earle.

The DC Department of Human Services (DHS) has re-designed its services for families who are receiving or are eligible for TANF and families experiencing housing instability. Service integration and case coordination are the two major strategies at the core of the new model, and many say they like the way DHS is doing business.

"I no longer feel like no one cares and that I'm all alone. My family is very grateful for all the care and support that has been shown us. It seems like there was a person on our team to help with everything," noted another customer of the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center (VWFRC).



## Services for Homeless Families

VWFRC, the central point of intake for all families facing challenges to their housing status, opened its doors last fall. At VWFRC, families are first given an assessment to determine the nature and extent of their needs. Eligible families may receive services such as prevention resources, including emergency rental and utility assistance, or temporary emergency shelter.

A Homeless Services Specialist (HHS) and a Vocational Development Specialist and Case Coordinator (VDSCC) are immediately assigned to the family to render services tailored to the results of the assessment.

“The convenience of having all of the agencies under one roof so the customer is not bogged down with the hurdles of having to travel to different parts of town for different services, really accommodates the customer. It cuts down on time, and confusion, and it just runs so smoothly. It also reduces the hostility customers feel toward us,” said Horace Kirby, a VDSCC at VWFRC.

Most homeless families are receiving or are eligible to receive TANF, so at VWFRC families can apply for TANF, complete the work readiness assessment, and get help obtaining employment or increasing their vocational or educational skills levels when needed. Customers with other barriers such as substance abuse or domestic violence are linked with the appropriate resources.

The Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) and a School Placement Specialist from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) are co-located to improve case coordination and integrated case management. Depending on the individual case, a family could also have a critical case manager assigned to help coordinate all barrier remediation services.

“Many families that otherwise would have gone into shelter are being diverted, and supported in other ways in the community so that they don’t have to go into shelter,” said DHS Director David Berns.



## A TANF Re-Design Success Story

Wilkins planned to go to a four-year University to study Mortuary Science; instead, at twenty-one years of age, she was a stay-at-home, single-mom collecting TANF. According to her, she became restless and miserable. "I just started feeling like I was wasting my life away—I just wasn't sure how to fix it," said Wilkins.

By 2012, when the Department of Human Services (DHS) had implemented work requirements as a part of the TANF redesign, and contracted new employment providers, Wilkins was ready to go back to school to increase her chances for getting a better paying job, or perhaps—to start a career. She met with her case manager, Mr. Alvin Smith, of Grant Associates, who helped her choose a program and get registered.

Grant Associates is a national workforce development company, contracted by DHS, with a proven reputation for engaging participants, and implementing effective programs that result in increased employment. They provide job placement and work readiness skills building services for TANF customers.

With the guidance of her case manager, last year Wilkins completed the Home Health Aide Certification at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) and began working for Human Touch, a DC-based home health aide agency. She now earns enough money so that she is no longer eligible to receive TANF, and she and her children live in their own apartment home where she pays the rent.

"It feels good to be working and making my own money. I could be making a little more, but this feels good. I also feel really good paying my own bills," said Wilkins, who plans to go back to UDC this fall to complete a ninety-day certification in phlebotomy. "I want to better my career, this is fine for the time being, but not where I want to stay," she added.



## Mayor's Human Services Budget for FY2014 Approved

The budget increases TANF funding by \$25 million for employment, training, case management, transportation, and other supports to move families to self-sufficiency within the newly established five-year time limits. Exemptions to the time limits for victims of domestic violence, those in approved employment and training programs, and others who need additional time or support to be successful, have also been funded with the passing of this legislation.

Of the other proposals approved by the Council, is an additional \$7 million for homeless services in fiscal year 2014. This funding includes an additional \$1 million for homeless youth, and most of the rest targeted to services for homeless families.

Six of the seven amendments to the Homeless Services Reform Act proposed by Mayor Gray passed with language that met the Mayor's objectives. One, focusing on transitional housing--did not pass. This amendment would have, among other things, allowed resources to be targeted to those most in need by diverting those who may have other housing options.



## DHS Introduces DCAS

Customers will be auto-assigned a case number after an interactive search of the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Automated Client Eligibility Determination System (ACEDS) and will be able to upload their documents into the system for processing. In the past, ACEDS allowed workers to enter information into the computer quickly; but still requires back-in processing. Since ACEDS has no real-time verification process with other databases, customers are often forced to visit the service center to apply for benefits or provide additional information.

The DCAS system is being designed to integrate with Federal and State data hubs to offer real-time verification of eligibility information. DCAS will also feature online access to benefits which will streamline the verification process and accommodate the customer's need for fewer office visits.

The initial release for DCAS—Release I, is scheduled for October 1, 2013. DHS staff will continue to use ACEDS until all cases have been merged into the DCAS system. The initial rollout for the new system design for DCAS will provide District residents with an online portal of instant access to healthcare benefits.

Customers will be able to apply for subsidized commercial health insurance for themselves and family members. In 2014, DHS will rollout Release II. This added component will give customers online access to additional healthcare benefits as well as public assistance benefits including Medicaid. Once this rollout is complete, ACEDS will be fully integrated with DCAS and it will be formally retired.



## EFFORTS Offers Hope to DV Victims

Morrison quit her job, wrote a proposal, secured some limited funding, and EFFORTS was born. EFFORTS, Employment for Former Offenders Receiving Treatment Services, started as an organization to help returning citizens transition back into the community. After noting that many returning citizens shared common issues such as homelessness, low educational attainment levels, limited income, and domestic violence, in 2006—less than ten years after starting the organization, Morrison expanded and began serving domestic violence victims as well.

“Many TANF recipients, returning citizens, and homeless people go through domestic violence, so we thought it was essential to add that piece. We applied for the grant, received the funding, and began providing the services,” said Morrison, referring to a contract between EFFORTS and the Department of Human Services (DHS). This contract affords any customer who receives Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) the opportunity to obtain domestic violence help and support.

Now EFFORTS helps those looking for a safe place to stay by referring them to shelters and other housing resources specifically for domestic violence victims. In addition, Morrison says victims are also eligible to receive case management, job readiness, and group counseling services. “Life skills, job readiness, job placement, teaching them how to go on interviews and use the computer and write a resume are some of the things we work on with all of our clients,” said Morrison.

Mattie Harden visited the EFFORTS office while The Vine staff was present; she confided that she was referred to EFFORTS by her Vocational Development Specialist (VDS) at the DHS Family Resource Center during her work readiness assessment. She added that her VDS thought it would be helpful for her to have someone to talk to about the domestic violence occurring with her child’s father.

Harden says she hopes to get help from EFFORTS to move on, “I want to be a good mother. It’s kind of scary when you



*EFFORTS customer, Mattie Harden.*



have a man who wants to kill you, but I was told that this is the place to come and get help," said Harden.



## DC Community Leaders Unite Against Homelessness

On Tuesday, June 18th, the ICH convened at N Street Village to discuss the Annual Plan for Fiscal Year 2014, which included several initiatives to assist the youth, family, veterans, and individual homeless populations. The Committee also discussed next steps in terms of establishing goals and tools to measure the Plan's success. The meeting was open to the public and included lots of energized feedback from members of the community.

Meetings are held bi-monthly on the third Tuesday of the month; the next meeting is set for July 16th and will continue discussions on the Annual Plan. For more information, visit the [Interagency Council on Homelessness \(ICH\)](#).



## Hurricane Season 2013—What You Should Know

### What should I do?

#### Before the Storm

- Build an emergency kit with food, water, a weather radio, flashlight, batteries, charged cell phone, extra charged battery or battery pack, medications, and other supplies to last at least 72 hours
- [Make a family communications plan](#) – Make a contact card with each family member's information and give copies to all family members. Designate an out of state relative as a central contact point for all family members.
- Learn evacuation routes and how to find higher ground. Determine where you would go and how you would get there if you needed to evacuate.
- Bring in all outdoor furniture, decorations, garbage cans and anything else that is not tied down.
- Consider a generator if your home is prone to storm related power outages

#### During the Storm

- Listen for weather alerts and instructions on National Weather Service (NWS) radio, and commercial TV and radio
- **Tornado Watch** - Tornadoes are possible. Remain alert for approaching storms. Watch the sky and stay tuned to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio, commercial radio or television for information.
- **Tornado Warning** - A tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. Take shelter immediately.

- Stay inside away from doors and windows
- Take shelter in a basement or interior hall or room with no windows
- Lie under a table or other strong object
- Continue listening to a NOAA Weather Radio or the local news for the latest updates.

### **After the Storm**

Stay alert for extended rainfall and subsequent flooding even after the hurricane or tropical storm has ended. If you have become separated from your family, use your [family communications plan](#) or contact the American Red Cross at 1-800-RED-CROSS/1 (800) 733-2767 or visit the [American Red Cross Safe and Well website](#).